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SUBJECT: HARD LABOR PAYS DIVIDENDS FOR MALAGASY PRISONERS

REF: 08 ANTANANARIVO 00788

¶1. (SBU) On January 4, 2009, 22 prisoners broke out of the high security prison located in Tsiafahy. The prison is located 17 kilometers south of Antananarivo and is considered Madagascar's most secure, housing the country's most violent criminals and a host of alleged political prisoners.

¶2. (SBU) At 2:00 am, the 22 prisoners made their escape. During the jail break, one prisoner was shot dead by the prison guards and four were apprehended. One of the apprehended prisoners told police they initiated their escape plan on January 1, 2009 by digging a crude tunnel with homemade tools and cooking pots from their prison cell. Once the tunnel reached the exterior prison grounds, the group used a rope fabricated from clothing and bedding to scale the perimeter wall.

¶3. (SBU) RSO's police contacts stated 17 fugitives remain at large and none of them were political prisoners. One high priority and dangerous fugitive is a Malagasy male who participated in the home invasion robbery of the French DCM's residence in January 2005.

¶4. (SBU) Following this bold prison break, two additional breaks occurred in different regions of the country. On January 4, nine prisoners escaped from a prison in the Tulear province. On January 5, seven prisoners escaped from a prison in the city center of Tamatave.

¶5. (SBU) Recently, RSO learned that in late November the Malagasy Minister of Justice traveled to a South African prison managed by Group 4 Securicor (G4S) who is also the US Embassy Antananarivo's LGF contractor. G4S funded all expenses and provided the Minister of Justice with a tour of their Mangaung Correctional Center, in Bloemfontein. G4S floated a tentative proposal to the Government of Madagascar (GOM) to build and fund the capital investment of a modern and secure prison. G4S would then recoup their capital investment with a 30 year contract to manage the prison with the capital costs paid back over the 30 year life of the contract.

¶6. (SBU) RSO assessment: This most recent prison break will continue to attract the attention of the Malagasy public and local media to the decrepit state of Malagasy prisons compounded by the general public's perception that the police are unable to mount an effective response to the rising crime rate. The GOM recognizes the chronic problems within the prison system and the Minister of Justice has received marching orders to develop a plan of action to repair the system. However, with a lack of new financial funding and the prison system at the bottom of the list for resources for law enforcement funding, it is doubtful that any improvements will occur in the immediate future. The only hope for the GOM would be if a foreign donor stepped forward with a financial grant and provided technical assistance to rectify the deficiencies of the prison system.

¶7. (SBU) RSO assessment continued: G4S was quick to recognize a potential business opportunity when a series of prison

breaks occurred in November 2008. Even with a business proposal of a new prison with zero out of pocket costs for the GOM by G4S, it is doubtful the GOM can even afford a deal involving a 30 year repayment plan to a professional western security company.

MARQUARDT